Connecticut

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BUOY HUNTERS

HEAVY LIFTING: COAST GUARD CREW REPAIRS MASSIVE NAVIGATIONAL BEACONS

Seaman Juan Reyes attaches a LED light to a buoy. The light is more durable and easier to repair than older light bulbs.

Jeff Holt/Register photos

ABOVE: The crew of the Coast Guard cutter Juniper repair several huge navigational buoys during a patrol in Long Island Sound.

LEFT: Seaman Dillon Smith, left, moves a buoy chain during repair work.

By Michael Gannon
Register Staff

THE 18,000-POUND BUOY, BIG AND HEAVY ENOUGH TO BASH A HOLE IN EVEN THE LARGEST SAILBOATS, WASN'T WHERE IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE.

The crew of the Coast Guard cutter Juniper, cruising in the Atlantic Ocean just south of Long Island, spotted the rogue buoy last week. The crew secured the massive metal structure and got a closer look.

They were amazed.

"It's supposed to mark the approach to the entrance to the channel for Boston Harbor. It got ripped from its anchor by the nor'easter, " said the Juniper's skipper, Lt. Cmdr. Rick Wester.

The deck of the Juniper is crowded with buoys and crew members.

Since the April 15 storm, the buoy had drifted more than 100 miles.

"And at 18,000 pounds that's a pretty dangerous thing to have floating around in the shipping lanes untethered," Wester said.

All in a day's work for the Juniper, which inspects, repairs — and occasionally hunts down — navigational buoys in and around Long Island Sound.

On a recent weekday, the weather on the Sound was perfect for boating, with gentle seas, cool breezes and temperatures in the 70s.

But for the men and women of the Juniper, the 13-hour workday won't resemble anything like a pleasure cruise.

The Juniper is on the fifth day of a six-day deployment to repair and replace navigation buoys that have been worn down by the elements, such as the nor'easter. The assignment: Hoist the buoys, which are up to 36 feet high and weigh up to nine tons, from the water; place them on deck; secure them and replace everything from the lighting system to the chains that anchor them to the bottom 30 feet below.

"Thirty years ago, working the buoy deck was considered one of the most dangerous jobs in the country," said Chief Warrant Officer Mike Tomasi, a 17-year veteran who serves as the deck safety officer.

Technology and training have made things far safer over time. But he said the buoy deck still remains a bad place to lose focus.

"You have about eight people working in a really confined space," Tomasi said. "The crane and other equipment are very loud, and you have to be able to hear each other. You can have a hydraulic problem with the crane with one of those dangling above the deck. The Sound is usually protected, but out on the ocean you can be doing this in 4- to 6-foot seas with 30-knot winds.

Lt. Commander Wester, a 1993 graduate of the Coast Guard Academy, has been the Juniper's skipper since July 2006. The 225-foot ship, stationed in Newport, R.I., is his first command and is responsible for "aids to navigation" from Newport to New York Harbor.

Their mission for the week is to replace buoys that have reached the end of their six-year lifespan, and to replace conventional lights atop oth-

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SHIP SHAPE

THE COAST GUARD CUTTER JUNIPER

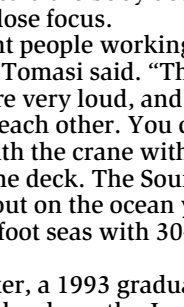
- **LENGTH:** 225 feet
- **CREW:** 6 officers, 34 enlisted
- **MAXIMUM SPEED:** 17 knots
- **RANGE:** 6,000 miles at 12 knots
- **ENGINE:** Twin 100 hp diesels
- **HOME PORT:** Newport, R.I.

How a modest Yale student created the world's greatest dinosaur mural

RUDOLPH ZALLINGER'S daughters and son gazed up at the east wall of the Great Hall at Yale's Peabody Museum of Natural History, appreciating anew their dad's world-famous dinosaur mural.

Lisa David, who had come up to New Haven from Delaware, taking a break from her studies at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, said it's hard to imagine how her father could have done such a thing.

"Now that I'm back in art school," she said, "I look at it and think, 'Oh my God! He painted this when he was in his 20s! How could anybody ever be willing to undertake this?'"



RANDALL BEACH

She added, "He never boasted about anything. But I remember him telling me that it was like giving birth to a dinosaur."

I can't tell you the gestation period of a stegosaurus, but I do know it took Zallinger 18 months of research and 3½ years of painting to create that mural. He began it as a student at the Yale School of Fine Arts.

Zallinger died in 1995; his wife, Jean, is also deceased. But his children gathered Wednesday for a reception marking a new exhibit that celebrates the 60th anniversary of "The Age of Reptiles" and the 40th anniversary of his companion mural, "The Age of Mammals."

When you stand in front of "Reptiles," you realize the sheer size of it: 110 feet long and 16 feet tall. As Zallinger remarked in his essay "Creating the Mural," he was "confronting an area of 1,760 square feet!"

That essay, as well as an analysis of the mural by Vincent Scully, Yale's history of art professor emeritus, are included in the new second edition of "The Age of Reptiles: The Art and Science of Rudolph Zallinger's Great Dinosaur Mural at Yale."

Scully described the mural as "a magnificent fresco of enormous size," with "majestic rhythms and titanic theme."

"The scene is awesome but not violent," Scully wrote. "The great beasts wander through a luminous landscape and display themselves to us, ruminant and bemused … It is pastoral painting, idyllic and full of peace, of nostalgia …"

Ah yes, there is something about dinosaurs that takes us back to our youth. I was only 3 in 1953 when Life magazine put "The Age of Reptiles" on its cover, propelling it to iconic status, and yet I feel as if I've always known of it. I didn't see the real thing until I came to New Haven in 1977, but it taps perfectly into our childlike awe of those creatures.

Arnold Gold/Register

From left, Kristina Zallinger, Lisa David and Peter Zallinger gather in front of their father's epic dinosaur mural at the Peabody Museum of Natural History.

Zallinger's son, Peter Zallinger, an art professor at Lyme Academy, was at the reception with his sister, Kristina Zallinger. He said he was on hand in 1997 when a portion of the mural was reproduced on an oil tank alongside the Pearl Harbor Memorial Bridge in New Haven. He was pleased his dad's work could be seen by thousands of motorists daily.

Tony Falcone, the New Haven-based mural painter, was also at the reception to reminisce about Zallinger, whom he described as his mentor.

After Falcone shyly introduced himself to the great man, they started having beers together at the Olde Heidelberg on Chapel Street.

"He was the true reluctant star," Falcone said. "He didn't think he deserved a lot of praise. He was amazed by the attention it got."

"I asked him, 'Tell me how you started that mural,'" Falcone recalled. "He said he walked up to the wall with his piece of charcoal, said, 'OK, here we go' and started to draw!"

But in his essay, Zallinger wrote, "Vividly etched in my memory is my trepidation as I scanned that endless wall while holding a slender stick of charcoal in my hand, about to begin my work with a tool seemingly so inadequate to the task."

Henry Townshend, who was creating a sculpture of a giant squid at the Peabody while Zallinger was painting the mural, said it was fascinating to watch him at work.

"Physically, it was a real problem," Townshend recalled. "I was up there on the scaffolding with him once. I was afraid I was going to fall off!"

Zallinger finished his epic work June 6, 1947. He had been paid $2,100 a year for five years.

In recent times scientists have noted the mural does not reflect recent scholarship. And so an interactive kiosk will be installed, showing visitors what the animals and plants from "The Age of Reptiles" would look like if depicted today. Some of the dinosaurs will sprout feathers.

But nobody's going to touch that mural. As editor Rosemary Volpe noted in the new edition of "The Age if Reptiles," doing this "would violate the mural as an independent work of art and destroy the integrity of Rudolph Zallinger's original vision."

Amen.

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Exhibit focuses on artists at Florence Griswold House

Associated Press

OLD LYME — The artists who hung out during the summer months at the Florence Griswold House were a wild and crazy bunch.

They played parlor games and practical jokes. They drew each other in caricature. They dressed up as harvest fruit and marched through the streets of Old Lyme.

But through it all, the creative minds of the Lyme Art Colony were focused on their art.

"I think the artists inspired one another to take risks," says Amy Kurtz Lansing, curator at the Florence Griswold Museum, who put together "A Circle of Friends: The Artists of the Florence Griswold House."

The exhibition, on display through July 1, features some rarely seen paintings and reveals a lighter side of Miss Florence's summer boarders. There are letters, postcards and drawings that show the affection and respect the artists felt for one another and their adopted summer home.

Lansing, who started work at the Florence Griswold last fall, was "getting to know" the museum's collection of American art when she was struck by the camaraderie of the artists and the playfulness in some of the work.

What caught her attention was the "The Fox Chase," a caricature of colony members that Henry Rankin Poore painted below the mantel in the dining room of the Griswold House. It is a tongue-in-cheek representation of the core group of painters who congregated at the boarding house during the early part of the 20th century.

"I thought, who are these artists who are painted on this panel?" Lansing says. "What stories did they have to tell?"

The artists felt comfortable in the Griswold House and praised their hostess in notes and letters for her hospitality and charm. Griswold allowed her tenants to paint on the walls and the doors. They also painted depictions of the house, its inhabitants and the Old Lyme landscape. William Chadwick's warmth for Miss Florence and his fondness for his summer home are evident in "Front Parlor, Florence Griswold."

Harry Hoffman's "Harvest Moon Walk" depicts the Lyme Art Colony's ritual of dressing as fruits and vegetables and joining townspeople for a procession to Chadwick Hill to celebrate the harvest moon.

The artists played a parlor game called the "Wiggle Game" in which they challenged each other to create pictures from three random lines drawn on a piece of paper. A display case holds several examples, including "Oh, Fudge," by Will Howe Foote.

There's also a panel painted by Childe Hassam, Griffin, Poore and Foote filled with inside jokes, such as a swarm of flies. Letters among the artists often referred to the "fly problem" at the boarding house, which had no screens on the windows.

Buoy: Coast Guard cutter keeps Long Island Sound safe

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ers with new, compact light emitting diode or LED systems.

Grant Westerson, executive director of the Connecticut Marine Trades association, represents the builders, brokers, marina owners and others who serve the owners of state's roughly 115,000 pleasure boats. But he said the state's economy and environment rely heavily on safe sea lanes.

"There are more than 6,000 (commercial) passings in the sound each year," he said. "That's a lot of gasoline, and bananas and other cargo. And what about a day (with poor visibility) when a tanker loaded with gasoline could run aground on the Thimble Islands in Branford and rip a hole in her hull? How important are those buoys then?"

Red or green buoys mark boat and shipping channels. They are 26 feet long and weigh 12,000 pounds. Candy-striped ones signal open water all around. Yellow ones, like the one foudn adrift, are for caution.

The day starts at 7 a.m. The 45 officers and crew will work a mile off shore, just outside the break wall to New Haven Harbor. If everything goes well, they will be done outside New Haven by 6:30 p.m., sail one hour to Bridgeport, and drop anchor for the night and wait in relative relaxation until tomorrow, when the entire routine starts all over again.

The LED lighting systems are being phased in throughout U.S. waters. And if not the most glamorous job in the service, Wester said it is a very important one.

"The older (lighting) systems have conventional bulbs under a red plastic cover," Wester said. "They run on batteries in the base much like car batteries. There are structures above the lights that have solar panels which recharge the batteries during the day."

"The nor'easter we had last week knocked a lot of those off," Wester said. "A fishing boat can come by and knock them off with their (outboard) rigging. The base is supposed to be watertight. But water can get in there and (damage) the batteries. A solar panel can get knocked off so the battery can't recharge. The bulb changer can get stuck and burn out.

"And yes, people do hit buoys."

The LEDs are self-contained, present a smaller target, emit a more reliable light, are considered more durable and can be replaced easily. Wester said in the Coast Guard, time is money — and safety.

"Right now we spend 60 to 70 percent of our time on buoy maintenance and replacement, and the remainder on law enforcement," Wester said. "We'd like to reverse those numbers, and we think the LED systems will let us do that. And we believe it will save money in the long run after the initial cost outlay."

Officers on the bridge nudge the ship up right alongside the buoy to be picked up. On the focsle deck next to Tomasi, Boatswain's Mate Chief Kat McSweeny threads a chain with a hook on one end and a long rope at the other through the buoy's upper structure in one toss. A seaman on down on the buoy deck grabs the chain with a hook to tie off the top. Another hook is used to secure a rope to a ring in the base. Another hook, attached to the crane operated by Yeoman Second Class Jen Fattarusso, is affixed, and things get moving, all very painstakingly.

The buoy is raised to the edge of the deck, where three more lines are attached. The anchoring chain is secured for later inspection. It is ever so deliberately raised up and over the deck, with four lines pulled from four different directions to steady and guide it. Then Fattarusso — with almost surgical precision — lowers it onto a set of saddle blocks which prop it up at an angle. Three more lines are attached and pulled taught to the deck with pneumatic drills.

Seamen armed with scrapers remove layers of mussels and other sea life. Seaman Juan Reyes climbs atop the structure to remove the old lights, and to add new ones to the buoys that are going back into the water.

"Juan is qualified in ATON (aid to navigation) maintenance," Tomasi said.

Fattarusso and a group of green helmets next turn their attention to the anchoring block, hauling it up to the deck to inspect the chain. As a rule the anchor chain is roughly three times the depth of the water. Those off New Haven are 90 feet long to accommodate the 28-foot depth.

On Buoy 6, only one section of the chain needs replacing.

The worn section is cut off with a torch and moved aside. A seaman connects the section of new chain to the portion remaining in place with a horseshoe-shaped link that is closed with a long, thick stainless steel pin.

"We call it a 'Heat and Beat'," Tomasi said

Boatswain's mate Jason Knapp applies the blow torch to the extended end of the pin until it is glowing red. He jumps out of the way and Reyes and Seaman Doug Duryea quickly pound the end flat with alternating blows from sledge hammers.

Then it's back into the water, and on to Bridgeport.

The crew pulled into Newport Thursday afternoon as expected, anticipating a few days' down time until going back out Sunday night.

Not so fast.

"We just got a call to get underway ASAP to tow a disabled fishing vessel 47 miles southeast of Montauk," Wester said.

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